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ABSTRACT

A study examined the contents of 18 public relations textbooks published between 1991-1997 to determine the quality of minority inclusion. Results indicated that, of the 8,071 pages examined, 97 pages included minorities. Findings suggest that the results of this study were not significantly different from those of a similar, earlier study of public relations textbooks published between 1979-1988. Textbooks should include information about different ethnic groups because they act as socializing agents for students not exposed to cultural diversity, and students would get a more accurate depiction of the environment within which their public relations strategies and tactics would take place. Further research is recommended to assess whether a textbook that excludes discussion of minorities adequately provides students with the insight and information necessary to design and implement public relations campaigns in a heterogeneous society. (Contains a table of data and 10 references; a sample coding sheet is appended.) (Author/CR)

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Almost Ten Years Later: An analysis of ethnic inclusion in public relations textbooks and reference books for the years 1991-1997 as compared to Kern-Foxworth's analysis of books for the years 1979-1988

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ABSTRACT

A content analysis of 18 public relations textbooks published between 1991 and 1997 was conducted to determine the quality of minority inclusion. Of a total of 8,071 pages examined, 97 pages included minorities. The findings are not significantly different from those of a similar study of public relations textbooks published between the years 1979 and 1988. The author suggests that textbooks should include information about different ethnic groups for several reasons. First, textbooks can act as socializing agents to students not exposed to much cultural diversity. Second, students would get a more accurate depiction of the environment within which their public relations strategies and tactics will take place. Third, the students would receive information they will need when as professionals they have to design culturally competent communications campaigns and products.

In 1990, the *Howard Journal of Communications* published a study that reported the representation of ethnic groups in public relations textbooks and reference books used in the instruction of college students (Kern-Foxworth, 1990). The author conducted a content analysis of 60 books published between the years 1979 and 1988 and found relatively few pages that included non-whites. Of a total of 21,841 pages examined, 152 pages (0.7%) included ethnic representation. The study indicated an underrepresentation of minorities in the textbooks.

Nearly 10 years worth of public relations textbooks and references have been published since that first study. This paper reports the findings that result from a preliminary analysis of books published in the last 10 years, and compares the findings to those of the first study. The purpose of the analysis is to determine if there has been greater minority representation. In addition, the study examines the quality of the text about minorities to determine whether public relations students are receiving information that would be useful to them when they become professionals.

Literature Review

In 1988, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (AEJMC) conducted a survey among its members to see whether there was minority inclusion in the textbooks they used in the classroom. The answers to the questions varied, but one answer in particular did not bode well for proponents of the notion that ethnicity is important in textbooks. In response to the question, "Does this textbook ignore People of Color?", one respondent wrote the following: "I regret the necessity of this questionnaire. All textbooks I use are basically color blind, as they should be (Luebke, 1988, p. 18)."

The idea that textbooks should be color blind or culture-free is a notion that many researchers would debate. Color-blind textbooks have ramifications. First, they ignore the existence of multiculturalism in the United States. Second, they do not make use of the potential to use textbooks as an instrument of ethnocentric socialization. Finally, they do not provide students with information to design programs and products to communicate effectively with different cultural or ethnic groups.

Cultural Diversity in the United States

The United States has long not been a homogeneous society. Up until a few decades ago, accounts of the development of this country did not take into account, the contributions to society by different ethnic and cultural groups. After some considerable insistence, the books began to include the efforts of all groups. The "new" history reveals the interdependence of ethnic and cultural groups as they worked to build this country. The presence of people of color in the history books provides a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the country.

Still, many books suffer in richness and depth by presenting the story of one dominant culture:

> The primacy of one culture within the national culture does not mean other cultures do not exist. It does mean, however, that many of the messages and materials tend to use the images, symbols, and language of the primary culture and not other cultures within the Nation (CSAP, 1994).

Kern-Foxworth argues that textbooks are socializing agents that can be used to introduce a variety of cultures to students (1990). Citing various studies (Van Dijk, 1987; Yuill, 1983; Black, 1967), the author purports that textbooks provide "important perceptions that mainstream students formulate about minorities in society" (Kern-Foxworth, 1990).

Culturally Competent Communications

Ethnicity infers that members of a group share commonalties in lifestyles, values, beliefs, attitude systems and perceptions that effect the communication process. Samovar and Porter (1985) purport that communication across cultures is complex. For effective communication across cultures, communicators must understand the cultural variations in the perceptual process:

> The attribution of meaning to messages is in many respects influenced by the culture of the message decoder. When the message being interpreted was encoded in another culture, the cultural influences and experiences that produced that message may be entirely different from the cultural influences and experiences that are being drawn upon to decode the message.

> Consequently, grave errors in meaning may arise that are neither intended nor really the fault of the communicators. These errors are the result of people with entirely different backgrounds being unable to understand one another accurately (Samovar & Porter, 1985, p. 29 - 30).

Clearly, an understanding of the influence of culture on the communication process is crucial to developing intercultural relationships. The culture component also has implications for designing communication programs targeted to reach cultural groups.

A great deal of training and writing aims to help communications professionals learn how to design communication tools and public relations campaigns that are culturally competent. For example, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention provides technical assistance bulletins and training for community-based organizations on how to develop culturally competent communications strategies (CSAP, 1994). The bulletin bases the methods of targeting audiences of color on two factors. First, the messages and materials should include a cultural component by incorporating race, ethnicity, language, nationality, and religion. Second, the professional must consider elements such as age, gender, sexual preference, education level, occupation, and income (CSAP, 1994).

Public relations textbooks should begin to train students to incorporate cultural factors into the public relations process.

Method

The study used the same methodology that was employed in the Kern-Foxworth study. This was to ensure that variables would not enter this study that were not in the Kern-Foxworth study.

Coders were asked to search the texts for minority inclusion. As in the Kern-Foxworth study, the coders reviewed "content listings, and the indexes for relevant information, illustrations, and pictures." They were given the following key words that would represent minority inclusion:

minorities, minority groups, ethnic groups, special publics, urban, blacks, Afro American, People of Color, Mexicans, Hispanics, Asian, Native American, civil rights, race relations, racial, stereotyping, and non-whites.

The coders used in this study were doctoral students in a doctoral course entitled "Afro American Issues in Communications." The coders were given verbal instructions on what to review, the key words to look for, and how to record the findings of their review. The coders also received coding sheets that provided written instructions on how to collect the data. The coding sheets facilitated consistency in the collection of the data because the coders used the same key words, and therefore were searching for the same indicators of minority inclusion.

The coders worked in teams of two. One person reviewed the text and the other recorded the findings on a coding sheet.

In addition to finding evidence of minority inclusion, coders had to describe the data by answering the following questions:

1. To which of the ethnic groups did the text refer?
2. Was/were the reference(s) important to the understanding of the status of minorities in America?
3. Did the material offer pertinent information about minorities that would benefit students once they entered the public relations profession?
4. Was the information positive, neutral or negative?

For the purpose of this study the terms positive, neutral or negative were defined to the coders and by the researcher as follows: Positive text or visual was defined as any description that portrayed persons-of color as solid citizens possessed of "good" qualities such as intelligence, honesty, integrity, hardworking, healthy, clean. Neutral text or visual was defined as the giving of pure facts such as statistics or demographics. Negativity was defined as any text or visual that portrayed stereotypes of people of color or portrayed them not as solid citizens. They had "undesirable" qualities and, for example, were poor, dishonest, dirty, mentally slow, or unhealthy.

In the final stage of the data collection, the researcher reviewed the books and data collected on the corresponding coding sheets. This step in the methodology verified the findings of the coders.

Quantitative Results

Eighteen books were examined, totaling 8, 071 pages. Of that number, 97 pages contained information about minorities. The year that had the most number of minority inclusion was 1995, with 32 pages (32.99%). The year with the fewest numbers of pages was 1993 with only 2 pages (2.06%). Two books had no reference to persons of color at all. The Kern-Foxworth study found the most references in the year 1988 with 51 pages (33.6%). The year with the fewest amounts was 1979 with 2 references (1.3%).

Four of the 18 books portrayed persons of color in a positive manner. Eight books presented facts about minorities and therefore in a neutral way. Three books portrayed minorities in a negative fashion.

The books examined were published within a six-year period. The second half of the years, 1995 - 1997, indicated a slight decrease in the percentage of minority references in the books. The first three years had 36 pages or 1.78% of a total of 2026 pages. The last half of the sample had 61 pages or 1.0% of references out of a total of 6045 pages. This decrease in minority inclusion in the second half of the sample did not occur in the Kern-Foxworth findings. The first half of the books contained .35% of minority inclusion. The second half had .87%.

Table 1 Inclusion of Minorities in Public Relations Books

Year analyzed	Total books per year	Total Pages per year	Pages with minorities
1991	1 (5.9%)	458 (5.68%)	3 (3.09%)
1992	2 (11.8%)	1148 (14.22%)	31 (31.9%)
1993	1 (5.9%)	420 (5.2%)	2 (.2.06%)
1994			
1995	5 (29.4%)	2355 (29.18%)	32 (32.99%)
1996	5 (29.4%)	2253 (27.91%)	12 (12.34%)
1997	3 (17.7%)	1437 (17.8%)	17 (17.5%)
TOTAL	17 100%)	8,071 (100%)	97 (100%)

Qualitative Results

The results from the analysis are reported by the categories from the coding sheets used by the doctoral students.

What were the references?

When a textbook included references to an ethnic group, the most frequently cited group was the African American. The second most frequently cited ethnic group was the Latino. Only one reference was made to each of the following groups: Kuwaiti, East Indian, Korean, Iraqi, Dominicans, Argentineans.

Were the references important to the understanding of the status of minorities in America?

Newsom, Turk and Kruckeberg (1996) discussed the problem of discrimination in America.

McElreath (1997) made an attempt to provide the reader with an insight into the status of African Americans and other minorities in the public relations profession. In addition, some text presented information on cultural relativism.

Did the material offer pertinent information about minorities that would benefit students once they entered the public relations profession?

Hendrix (1992, 1995) provided case studies to illustrate how communication strategies can be designed to reach ethnic groups. For example, one case examined the strategy used by public relations professionals to deliver health promotion messages to an Hispanic community in the United States.

Baksin, Aronoff, and Lattimore (1997) took a similar approach. Their text provided samples of public relations tools such as communication kits and newsletters that included text and photos of minorities. Newsom, Turk, and Kruckeberg (1996) provided samples as well, including a bilingual mail insert (english/spanish) and a public service announcement designed by the American Heart Association to reach African Americans, a group that is high risk for heart disease.

Smith (1996) listed ethnic professional organizations that could help a future practitioner target specific groups.

Was the information positive, neutral or negative?

Some texts could be interpreted as portraying minorities or members of ethnic groups in a negative manner. For example, one book included several photographs of people of color in need. Some were portrayed as hungry, and other as needing money for scholarships.

Another book did not present a balanced view of minorities and only discussed the problems of minorities. Another book provided a distorted view by presenting African American only as entertainers. This text was supporting existing stereotypes of African Americans.

One book was particularly positive in its portrayal of minorities. A 1991 textbook included several photos of minorities as having admirable qualities and/or high-status positions. For example, there were photos of Japanese executives in an annual report, an African American scholar, a poster of Indira Ghandi, portrayed as an Indian heroine. A 1995 textbook was similar in its presentation of minorities. There were several photos that portrayed minorities from all walks of life, but in a positive manner. This book had photos of African Americans (as entertainers, leaders, fun-loving kids), a Kuwati girl at a congressional hearing.

Discussion

The majority of the textbooks analyzed in this study contained information that was neutral about minorities. In the context of this study, a neutral text or visual is not regarded as a flaw in a publication. If the text provided some understanding of a culture it was regarded as providing information that students could use later in the design of culturally competent communication strategies and products.

The findings indicate, however, that there is not nearly enough representation to give students the understanding and the insights that would help them when they become professionals. The findings indicate that textbooks are making no progression in that direction either. There is not a remarkable distinction between the culture content of 20 year-old books and those published in 1997.

The textbooks that do include information about minorities tend to focus on African Americans and this too creates an inaccurate view of the multiculturalism that exists in America. The underrepresentation of other minority groups (i.e., homosexuals, Hispanics, Asians) that account for a significant portion of the population in America (if not buying power) hampers the student's adequate preparation for a future when he or she will be asked to design diverse cultural programs.

The comparison between the results of this study and the Kern-Foxworth study is not entirely equal because of the disparity of the sample size. However, the findings are indicative in that the sample in this study show no change whatsoever. If there had been a remarkable increase in minority inclusion in the textbooks published in the last six years, this study would have indicated at least some change.

Minority inclusion in textbooks has not improved nor has the nature of the content. These findings give some indication as to the quality of the training and preparation these textbooks give to the public relations student. Further research is recommended to assess whether a textbook that excludes discussion of minorities adequately provides the student with the insight and information necessary to design and implement public relations campaigns in a heterogeneous society.

Appendix:
Books used in the analysis

1991

Newsom, D., & Carrell, B. (1991). *Public relations writing: Form & Style.* (3rd ed.). Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

1992

Hendrix, J.A. (1992). *Public relations cases.* (2nd ed.). Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

Seitel, F. (1992). *The practice of public relations.* (5th ed.). New York, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Wilcox, D. L., Ault, P. H., & Agee, W. K. (1992). *Public relations: Strategies and tactics.* New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

1993

Simon, R., & Wylie, F. W. (1993). *Cases in public relations management.* Lincolnwood, Illinois: NTC Business Books.

1994

Simon, R., & Wylie, F. W. (1994). *Cases in public relations management.* Lincolnwood, Illinois: NTC Business Books.

1995

Goldman, J. (1995). *Public relations in the marketing mix.* Lincolnwood, Illinois: NTC Business Books.

Hendrix, J. A. (1995). *Public relations cases.* (3rd ed.). Belmont. California: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

Newsom, D. , & Carrell, B. (1995). *Public relations writing: Form and style.* (4th ed.). Belmont: California: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

Wilcox, D. L., Ault, P. H., & Agee, W. K. (1995). *Public relations strategies and tactics.* (4th ed.). New York, New York: HarperCollins College Publishers.

Wilcox, D. L., & Nolte, L. W. (1995). *Public relations writing and media techniques.* New York, New York: HarperCollins College Publishers.

1996

Bivins, T. (1996). *Handbook for public relations writing.* Lincolnwood, Illinois: NTC Business Books.

Kendall, R. (1996). *Public relations campaign strategies: Planning for implementation.* (2nd ed.). New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishing Company.

Newsom, D., Turk, V. J., & Kruckeberg, D. (1996). *This is PR: The realities of public relations.* Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Parsigian, E. K. (1996). *Proposal savvy: Creating successful proposals for media projects.* Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Smith, Ronald D. (1996). *Becoming a public relations writer: A writing process workbook for the profession.* New York: HarperCollins College Publishers.

1997

Baskin, O., Aronoff, C., & Lattimore, D. (1997). *Public Relations: The profession and the practice.* (4th ed.). Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark Publishers.

McElreath, M. P. (1997). *Managing systematic and ethical public relations campaign.* (2nd ed.). Dubuque, IA: Brown & Benchmark Publishers.

Wilcox, D. L., & Nolte, L. W. (1997). *Public relations writing and media techniques.* (3rd ed.). New York, New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

Coding Sheet Used to Collect Data

Minority Representation in Public Relations Textbooks (1990 - present)

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Recording Sheet

Coding Instructions

Review the content listings, indexes, and other descriptive pages for relevant information, illustrations, and pictures. Accept the following key words as minority representation:

minorities, minority groups, ethnic groups, special publics, urban, blacks, Afro American, People of Color, Mexicans, Hispanics, Asian, Native American, civil rights, race relations, racial, stereotyping, non-whites.

Please precede to complete the form.

Section I

Title of Text_____

Year of Publicaiton_____

Publisher_____

Race of Author_____
(Use last name to determine racial heritage. Confirmation will be made at a later date.)

Section II

Number of Minority/minority-related references_____

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Section III
What was/were the reference(s)?

Was/were the reference(s) important to the understanding of the status of minorities in America?

Did the material offer pertinent information about minorities that would benefit students once they entered the public relations profession?

Was the information positive, neutral, or negative?

References

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Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. (1994), *You can use communication principles to create culturally sensitive and effective prevention materials.* Washington, DC: CSAP Communications Team.

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Pratt. D. (1972). *How to find and measure bias in textbooks.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.

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Van Dijk, T. A. (1987). *Communicating racism: Ethnic prejudice in thought and talk.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Yuill, P. J. (1983). *Little Black Sambo: A closer look.* New York: The Racism and Sexism Resource Center for Education.